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Implementation: A New Approach to Multinational Coordination in Afghanistan

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"NATO is not winning in Afghanistan," the Atlantic Council starkly concludes.[1] Progress is "under serious threat," another Afghanistan study reports.[2] As these views appeared, an internationally backed concept of a "supercoordinator" was rejected by Afghan President Hamid Karzai, resulting in redoubled hand wringing in Western capitals. The view that we must do better is correct; we are neither providing resources sufficient to ensure success nor to have a margin for reverses or surprises, a point I made repeatedly as ambassador in Afghanistan. Far less developed is an understanding of what we need to do and what is possible.

The debate has concentrated on *policy*: on calls for a single coordinating point for all aid donors and military participants, for an integrated NATO strategy for the war, for multinational unity in policy on drugs, and for economic development. These ideas have merit, but joining the calls for coordination to a new focus on existing strategy could more quickly provide action than starting over. Unfortunately, all of the strategic ideas being discussed are over-promising results. Lacking is a real understanding of what these ideas will require, why some have dangers of their own, and, above all, of the difference between policy and *implementation*. Until we master the art of multinational implementation, most of the policy ideas being debated will continue to fall short in practice.

While this essay is devoted to Afghanistan, a hard look at the reality of what has and has not worked can also illuminate some general principles. Some of these principles that may have broader applicability are as follows.

A Few Basic Principles

Local sovereignty and national sensitivities cannot be a repeated excuse for corruption and inadequate performance, but neither can they be ignored. Made-in-Washington solutions repeatedly fail to achieve the local acceptance essential to effective, rapid implementation.

There are real limits on strategic coordination from and through foreign capitals, a point that is oversold as a road to solutions and that can provoke opposition on the ground if not carefully handled. Further, coordination of multination groups is always a matter of imperfect compromises. It is an illusion to expect sovereign states to reach a single plan that is sufficiently detailed to be mechanically applied on the ground.

Coordinated strategies require compromise in goals, some of which must come from us. We—not only others—may need to let go of pet concepts that we try to impose from a distance. If we decide that such prices are worth paying, we need to start building domestic political, especially Congressional, support for such changes—something that is not apparent in public discussion.

The United Nations has a particular importance and ability to smooth operational coordination on the ground that stands in contrast to the slow-moving and sometimes sterile debates in New York. To play that role effectively, however, the United Nations needs the support, mandate, and staff on the ground.

Finally, and it is a central theme of this essay, far more can be accomplished than is now the case by strengthening implementation on the ground. Increasing the

flexibility to shift funds to meet changing priorities, demonstrating a willingness to accept some management risks to speed up project delivery, and providing adequate and experienced staff in the capital and the provinces would give improved results more quickly than many of those debating grand policy might realize.

Main Points

As applied to Afghanistan, the main points in this essay can be summarized as follows:

- The concept of supercoordinator has some serious risks; its rejection may have been a good thing if it forces rethinking.
- The concept of a single, coordinated strategy has theoretical validity, but it is promising more than it can deliver.
- We must do better to harness the drive for better coordination to the existing, agreed strategy.
- Informal coordinating mechanisms should be strengthened to fill some of the gaps.
- The United Nations and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) need more senior staff.
- We need to increase our civilian presence in the provinces along with the resources at its disposal.
- More flexible contracting mechanisms and a willingness to accept some management risks could significantly speed up project delivery in the provinces.
- Development agencies of all nations need more local flexibility to determine the redirection of funds within Afghan programs.
- NATO militaries need funds (as the US military has) to meet the immediate needs of military operations.
- In sum, while these ideas are no panacea, a greater concentration on strengthening the implementing authorities and practices could markedly improve the situation.

Ultimately, of course, these principles and practices cannot be a substitute for more troops, money, and better performance by the Kabul government. Nevertheless, even fresh qualms about the ability of President Karzai to "deliver" to his people would be assuaged simply by improved implementation of the policies already in place.

What Is This Thing Called Implementation?

In Aesop's sixth-century fable, the mice called a council to consider how to protect themselves from the cat and concluded that hanging a bell on the cat would provide sufficient warning. All was well with this policy conclusion until one old mouse asked, "Who will bell the cat?" That was a question of implementation. Since there was no answer, the policy was useless. We must get beyond nice-sounding policy concepts and look at implementation.

Another way to understand implementation is to consider the time lag between decisions in capitals and their effects on the ground. In the winter of 2006, the US government asked for a large increase in development funding for Afghanistan. The budget went to the Congress in February 2007. The so-called base budget was approved over the summer, but as of this writing the funds in the supplemental have not been. The money did not begin to become available in Afghanistan until September 2007. By the time contracts could be let, winter was setting in, so no road projects that depended on these funds could be started before 2008. Shortages of USAID personnel further delayed contract awards.

The decision to increase funding was a *policy* decision. What happened with available funding while waiting on new money and how one dealt with changing problems on the ground in the following year and a half—a long time in a war—was *implementation*. Until we focus more sharply on the problems of implementation, we will continue to have inadequate performance and disappointing results.

We need to review what we are doing on the ground that does work and how we could expand it. We will still need policy decisions on funding levels, numbers of troops, and many other issues, but policy alone is not a sufficient answer.

Why Donor Coordination Is Hard

The constant refrain of the need for an "integrated strategy" is correct but lacks an understanding of why getting there is so hard. Simply put, the donors and the troop contributors are sovereign nations with some very different concepts about what is to be done. This is a constant of alliance warfare. In World War II the British and Americans had huge struggles over strategy, and neither could fully control the Free French government under Charles de Gaulle.

Each government answers politically to its own public, is influenced by its own history, and has

its own strongly held strategic views. The basic need to push simultaneously on development, governance, and security is well understood (and in many ways the United States is a leader in this integration), but there are significant differences of approach among those doing the majority of the fighting—the US, Canada, Britain, and the Netherlands—and much larger differences between them and the Germans, Italians, Spanish, and others. For this reason NATO has not been able to implement one military strategy in Afghanistan. Hence while the concept of—indeed the need for—a single, coordinated military and development strategy is theoretically sound, it, like the policy of belling the cat, is unlikely to be realized for practical reasons.

Some changes are possible; indeed there have been a number of adaptations as nations have struggled to find ways effectively to integrate war fighting with development. Assuming that a renewed effort to draft a coordinated strategy can somehow bridge these differences or drive them away is simply unrealistic.

What we will probably get out of such a drafting exercise will be a statement of general, broad principles that will not change much on the ground. The effort to harmonize radically different approaches is more likely to be divisive than unifying. NATO has not been able to find the additional battalions, trainers, and aircraft that have already been identified within NATO planning (now out of date). It is fanciful to think that the effort to write a new plan will overcome the political resistance in multiple countries to providing the necessary resources.

This is not to say that efforts at coordination are wasted, but rather that we need to be far more realistic about what can be done on a policy level and what must happen in day-to-day decision making within existing constraints.

If military coordination is hard, economic coordination is even harder. There are 26 NATO nations plus 14 non-NATO countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and Sweden with troops under NATO/ISAF[3] (International Security Assistance Forces) command. There are over 60 economic assistance contributors, including major donors like Japan and international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Asian Development Bank. Each of these donors brings its own views on long-term development, its own political sensitivities, its own community of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and its own bureaucracy. The latter is a further problem since many European states have separate development ministries that are not under the control of the foreign ministry and in some cases have deeply entrenched views on how development should be kept separate from (for some, "pure of") political purposes.

The difficulties we experience in achieving coordination within the US government alone (think about hurricane relief) should give us some idea of how difficult it is to bring about detailed coordination between over 60 sovereign nations.

Agreement exists on many aspects of a common economic approach. Yet the public discussion is forgetting what we already have to work with amidst the search for new policies. The London Compact[4] of 2006 provides agreement on some 40 individual benchmarks, a roadmap, for progress over five years (2006–2009). That effort took months of negotiation. A new negotiation will take the same amount of time and probably still fail to solve many of the current problems. Rather than start over, we could accomplish much by joining current calls for improving coordination to the strategy already agreed on but in need of renewed effort. To see why this is so, it is instructive to reflect on lessons learned from the previous strategic negotiation and how we might build on the London Compact.

The level of agreement, despite its many specific points, is still very broad and provides only coordination of goals; it does not specify how they are to be achieved. A "new strategy" would be unlikely to get much further. Another point to note is that most of the specifics were negotiated in Kabul among the ambassadors, international organization representatives, and the Afghan government. While various drafts were sent back to capitals and delegations traveled once to Kabul, the level of detail was such that capitals were able to provide little real guidance. Because the Afghan government has very few highly qualified personnel, the best Afghan ministers were almost totally consumed with negotiation.

One lesson I took from this effort is that such negotiations exact a very real price in slowing down work in Afghanistan. With our large staffs it is difficult for Washington policymakers and think tanks to comprehend how major negotiations can bring all other work by the Afghan development and economic ministries to a halt. In this case it was worth the price, but we should be very careful not to divert them frequently from getting on with work that actually shows results on the ground.

Coordinate Whom?

The recent failure to appoint Lord Paddy Ashdown as supercoordinator has blurred two distinct issues: coordinating donor efforts and

coordinating with, or for, the Afghan government. Getting the Afghan government to fight corruption more effectively and to improve the delivery of services to its people is a very real problem. The complaints are eroding Afghan popular support for the government and the dream of a modern state. We must address this, but in ways that reinforce an Afghan government that is, and must be perceived as, sovereign. This is particularly the case when a nation such as Afghanistan has endured years of feeling its fate has been determined by the interference of outsiders, in essence replaying the history of nineteenth-century invasion and the rivalry of the "great game."

The rumored appointment of Lord Ashdown as a high-powered superenvoy was seen by many in Afghanistan as an attempt by foreigners to reassert control and fueled propaganda about foreign "occupation." This sentiment is extremely dangerous. Afghans are notoriously xenophobic. As opinion polls confirm, they have welcomed our forces and our projects to deliver them from years of violence and misgovernment, but only with the understanding that we are there to help *them* to build their own state. If we fall into the trap of seeming to make the decisions and run the state ourselves, then we will fail.

The Afghan government is now sovereign, but very weak. To grow stronger it must take more responsibility for hard decisions. Yet if those decisions are seen publicly to have been dictated by foreigners, we would undercut the very institutions we are seeking to strengthen. Every politically painful decision for necessary reforms would be seen as a foreign imposition. Every mistake, and there are bound to be many, would be a foreign mistake used by political opponents within the system as well as by the Taliban to build resentment of foreign domination. The Afghan government would find it far more convenient to abdicate responsibility and blame foreigners than to take charge and learn from its own mistakes.

All this is terribly unfair to Lord Ashdown, who may well have been prepared to operate very differently in Afghanistan than he did when he had virtually sovereign powers in Bosnia. In politics, unfortunately, the perception is often the reality. A new UN coordinator has now been named. As he begins his work, great care will be needed to make clear that it is the donors who are to be coordinated. Much persuasion and some pressure will still be needed with the Afghan government, but it needs to be quiet, carried out behind the scenes, and done with great care to avoid the appearance of foreign domination. In the end, the Karzai rejection may have been a good thing if it forces a rethinking of the coordinator's role.

The Price of Compromise

More coordination means more compromise. This is a fact of life among sovereign states. Some of those compromises are going to be politically painful, for the United States as well as others. In counternarcotics policy we have tried to dictate an approach with a priority on eradication including aerial spraying. We failed, not a good thing to be seen to happen to a superpower, and in the process we wasted time that could have gone into improving coordination. Now the poppy harvesting season is about to begin and we have little to show for a year's effort.

The point here is not to propose a better counternarcotics policy but only to observe that, if we truly want a coordinated policy, it is going to have to have a different mix of carrots and sticks, probably with less eradication and more agricultural assistance. This may not be popular in Congress, but if we want coordinated policy then we, the other donors, and the Afghan government will have to make some compromises. In addition, we will have to be prepared to defend in public the price of coordination—not be seen as grudgingly going forward with a policy we do not accept. Whether such compromises are possible is an open question. But if we are to extol "coordination," we need to start now to build political acceptance of what it is likely to mean.

Other policy areas will also require such give and take. For example, the building and deployment of the Afghan army is now largely controlled by the United States. Some nations feel that too few Afghan army units are supporting their troops and too many support US forces. I supported US control because our contribution to the training and equipping effort is many times larger than the very modest help we are receiving from our NATO partners. I still believe that if NATO is to have a greater voice, it will have to pay a much higher price.

If NATO nations do in fact decide to step up their efforts to support training, we will have to compromise with them on where Afghan units are deployed and how they support both development and combat operations. For America, coordination may mean a lessening of control. That might be a correct decision, but it would not be an easy one. Before we talk coordination we need to consider seriously whether we are willing to make the compromises necessary to achieve it.

Coordination Through Implementation

Thus far, the public discussion of how to improve effectiveness in Afghanistan has focused on policy. Policy is important. We need more troops and more money. At the same time, there is a whole level of improvement that is within our reach

now but that is being neglected by the single-dimensional focus on policy.

The broad framework of the Afghan Compact is being utilized on the ground but largely forgotten as foreign capitals seek new policy choices. While it is not perfect—it is a compromise document after all—it provides a mechanism for bypassing the endlessly time-consuming debate on what should be coordinated to do the job better.

We are falling short of meeting several of the benchmarks. The starting point for improvement is to understand that those of us who were deeply involved in negotiating the compact never expected that the benchmarks would be easily met. This would have been the fallacy of expecting policy decisions to work automatically when they do not. Rather, we viewed the benchmarks as political levers for the future. Because they represent international and Afghan government commitments, each one can be used to leverage the necessary decisions.

For example, there is the requirement for an appointments commission to create a responsible process for many senior appointments. With quiet, sustained, but forceful international support, this mechanism could gradually act as a brake on the politically inspired appointment of corrupt officials. Other examples include commitments to priorities in development to which donors and the Afghan government have already reached agreement. If we are to improve performance, we need to look past the formal mechanism and to the real world of effective cooperation.

The London Compact set up a Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB) to oversee cooperation. The reports of this group are unusually frank for an international institution, but the JCMB itself is too large for effective day-to-day coordination. The reason for this is simple: too many governments wanted in and there was no consensus to say no. The JCMB also includes several states with separate frictions either between themselves (e.g., India and Pakistan) or between individual states and the Afghans (Russia and Iran being the two foremost examples). Because of these problems, the JCMB has been rightly criticized, but this discussion has generally missed the point of how actual coordination can be managed.

One example of effective coordination came in energy policy. The United States, Germany, India, the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank are all involved in a major project to bring electricity from Central Asia to Kabul. These efforts were uncoordinated, and the concerned ministries of the Afghan government were working at cross-purposes.

A team of US Embassy and USAID officers working with private sector American experts developed a plan for a coordinated approach. UNAMA[5] took the lead in circulating the paper for discussion and pulling together all the relevant ambassadors and aid mission directors. We hammered out a compromise approach, not everything we had wanted but most of it. This allowed a coordinated approach to the Afghans.

Months of discussion, some pressure, and some increases in funding have overcome most of the obstacles. Coordination within the Afghan government has improved. We cannot make up for all of the time lost to the lack of coordination, but we have been able to pick up the pace, bring on a new power project to fill one major gap, and improve international support for the necessary power agreements with Central Asian states.

Through a similar process we were able to reach agreement on the ministries that would receive priority in building staff capabilities. Different donors were involved in this than in the electrical power issues.

There was a strong need to get moving on new commercial and economic laws. Yet individual technical experts from different nations were giving conflicting advice within some ministries, and the donors were not enforcing any control. Again, drawing up a suggested priority list, arguing out the rationale, and making compromises to secure agreement worked, and several of the required laws have been enacted.

In each case the role of the United Nations was critical to avoid the impression that the United States was trying to dictate policy. Because UNAMA was mandated to coordinate, it was able to assemble the senior level of donors and Afghan officials. In this cooperative atmosphere, progress was made.

These efforts were too sporadic to meet the current need for improvement, but the lessons learned suggest areas that could be systematically reinforced. One lesson is that cooperation often breaks down over technical disagreement. The policy goal may be agreed—for example, passing a series of commercial laws or doing an energy project—but this does not reconcile honest differences of opinion among technicians and advisers on how to proceed. Because the foreign advisers report to different countries and organizations, there is no unified chain of command, and because countries are sovereign, they do not and will not accept orders.

There is strong resistance at working levels to raising issues for higher resolution. Some of this

is human nature. No one likes to tell the boss that he or she can't solve a problem. I cannot count the number of times I thought an issue had been settled only to find when inquiring a month or two later that it was still stuck in the international coordinating group for lack of consensus. "Why didn't you tell me earlier?" often elicited the simple answer that each week people thought they would make progress in a week or two, so they kept the issue in the technical group, where it remained unresolved.

Some resistance is a matter of political turf. Some USAID specialists are resistant to letting an issue be decided at a political level by the ambassador, but in the end they all work under ambassadorial authority. This is not true for other countries. With most European states the problem is much larger when development officials who report to separate ministries are asked to let ambassadors, who report to the foreign ministry, make a decision. Yet time after time, when we could get the required senior-level people together, we were able to reach resolution. Sometimes just the call for a senior-level meeting pushed the working groups to find their own consensus.

Another problem was the small size of the UNAMA staff. The UNAMA head was very able as were his two deputies (one for development and one for political affairs). These three people, often engaged in crisis management, sometimes absent on leave or drawn off to international meetings, could not move on every issue as quickly as they or I would have liked. A new superenvoy would help only if he understands how much of his task lies in detailed work in Kabul and has the key staff to improve performance.

Before turning to how these experiences might guide improvements, it is instructive to reflect on two other examples of cooperation, one of which involved the Afghan police.

Reform of the police is happening very slowly, too slowly. A process of competitive examination and professional qualification is run by the Americans, the Germans, and the Afghans. The first phase replaced 31 top officers. The second phase to replace provincial police chiefs was delayed for many reasons, including Afghan politics. When it finally took place, 14 police generals were left whose human rights records and lack of competence raised serious questions. Each of them had important political backing. A policy limited to political pressure for their removal, especially public high-level pressure, would have put President Karzai in a vulnerable position domestically, caused a crisis, and might not have produced change.

However, agreement on setting up a probation and review system was reached. A number of senior Afghan police generals worked on the probation board along with the US and German ambassadors, the representative of the European Union, the German special ambassador for police matters, and the UNAMA director. This evaluation process worked. The international presence gave the police generals the support to make strong recommendations and withstand pressure. The foreigners were able to make sure that important information came to the board's attention and was not suppressed. Ultimately the decisions were Afghan, and they were unanimous. All but one of the officials in question was moved out, the exception being one where the general judgment that he should remain was broadly shared.

The process took longer than we would have liked. It was not dramatic, but it achieved the desired result, effected the removal of the poor officers, and was a step forward in strengthening an Afghan institution, the Ministry of Interior, that still has a long way to go. Success came not from a single coordinator or from grand policy decisions but from coordinated pressure and cooperation by ambassadors who realized the importance of resolution without a public crisis and in a way that built Afghan responsibility. The point is simply that resolution did not depend on new grand policy but on cooperation on the ground and having enough trust from our governments to contain foreign criticism until we could produce results.

A final example concerns assistance cooperation to military missions. NATO/ISAF forces (US, Canadian, and Afghan with Dutch, British, and Danish support) fought two large battles outside the city of Kandahar in southern Afghanistan in the summer and fall of 2006. In military terms both were successful, but after the first we failed to move with the governmental and developmental support necessary to secure our gains. In the second case we did much better, although the recent shortage of Afghan and Canadian troops is causing some loss of control.

Three different types of problems bedeviled us. On the Afghan side, there were hardly any qualified people to plunge in, assess needs, and work with the local governor to shore up governmental authority and the delivery of services. It took months just to recruit and place a handful of qualified additional Afghan staff in four provinces despite enormous efforts and full policy agreement. We made progress slowly, but it is clear that a great deal of time and education will be necessary to solve the underlying problem of the lack of qualified Afghan staff.

On the military side, we did not have the combination of Afghan and foreign forces to take full advantage of ISAF success. That is a policy issue and requires willingness to commit more troops until a much larger Afghan force can be fielded.

On the economic side, the rigidities of project financing made it difficult to find the funds to respond to an unanticipated crisis. The US military did have a resource[6] that helped fill the short-term gap. USAID was able to move money faster than any other country for midterm needs. Canada and Germany met longer-term needs. Overall, we lacked the financial flexibility to respond to the needs we identified or to support well-established Afghan governmental requests.

A new coordinating body, the Policy Action Group (PAG) was set up with key Afghan leaders and their foreign military and diplomatic counterparts from countries whose troops are fighting in the South. The PAG did help to define issues but could make only limited progress in solving these problems.

These three areas of coordination—in development, in overcoming a political crisis, and with the military—are examples of what is really at issue in improving performance in Afghanistan. There is certainly a role for big policy decisions, but what these examples show above all is how much falls to implementation beyond the policy realm. The lessons they provide could help us do better and faster, if we will pay attention.

Real Actions to Improve Implementation

We should *use the coordination we already have*. The JCMB process can be expanded to focus capitals on areas needing policy resolution. There is a JCMB meeting every three months, alternating between Kabul and foreign capitals. The Kabul meeting could, but does not, produce focused issues for decision in the subsequent meeting abroad. For example, the justice sector now has strategies agreed by the Afghans and the internationals. Shortfalls in funding and support could be regularly reported for action by capitals. Not every requirement may be met, but identifying them would separate the calls for new policy in the justice sector from the need to fund the policies already in place.

UNAMA could do far more to press forward in resolving specific issues if it had a larger staff. It needs continued forceful leadership (the job has now been filled), at least a senior deputy devoted to problem solving and to staying on top of blockages as they emerge. That leader needs a small addition to the staff to pull together discussion papers and organize senior meetings. The expansion of UNAMA provincial offices needs to be continued. This could strengthen the coordination of provincial and donor efforts that are still too weakly tied to central plans.

The United States could strengthen this process. In Kabul we have advisers in virtually every area. Only we "cover the waterfront." We could take on a much more systemic effort to identify blockages, solicit papers summarizing the issues and making recommendations, and give UNAMA the raw material to be effective. To do so, USAID needs more senior staff. This is a large and separate discussion, but the crux of the matter is that it needs to be staffed to do strategic thinking, crisis management, and program implementation. So far it is only staffed for the latter function despite recommendations by my successor and by me.

In the provinces we need to increase the civilian, USAID, and Department of Agriculture representatives to increase coordination between our military stabilization and long-term development efforts. It is true that the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) need more coordination with central Afghan development efforts, but it is fatuous to believe we can increase the coordination and reporting efforts of the field on the back of a staff that is already working eighteen hours a day, seven days a week.

Several actions could considerably improve field effectiveness. One is to provide USAID officers in the PRTs the funds and contract expertise to bid and administer small contracts, perhaps up to $500,000, without having to use our slow, top-heavy, central contracting mechanisms and add an expensive layer of foreign contractors to the process. To make this work, we would have to accept that some unwise decisions may be made in selecting small, local firms and NGOs to discharge projects, but it is exactly these local Afghan firms and NGOs with community involvement that we need to strengthen. We need to understand that there is a tension between moving money quickly and demanding every possible bureaucratic process to prevent mistakes. No perfect balance is possible, but there needs to be more room in the process to make judgment calls and more willingness to accept risk in the interest of efficiency.

Secondly, in provinces without US military or major Western donors, more money, staff, and the mechanisms to use the funds quickly are particularly important to bring results at the local level. We, with other donors, need to change the impression that we are neglecting poor provinces that are not producing opium.

Finally, if we are to increase the provincial civilian presence, we must increase the security protection and vehicles devoted to civilian missions. No PRT at present has the resources to run more than three missions a day "outside the wire." It will do little good to increase the numbers of civilians in such teams if they have to fight each other to get out to their jobs.

Donors as a whole need more flexible funding mechanisms to move money in a crisis, coordinate with the military, and respond rapidly to emergencies.

The United States in particular needs flexible reserve funding for civilian agencies.

Other donor nations need to empower their ambassadors to resolve coordination problems (only the US ambassador has such authority). Many countries will resist subordinating their developmental bureaucracies to the political. Yet if they cannot achieve coherence within their internal mechanisms in the midst of a war, it is pointless to suggest that this can be overcome by policy-level agreement among nations.

NATO/ISAF needs its own CERP-like fund to deal with immediate, operationally related humanitarian problems and link immediate relief to development. US forces can rapidly pay for damage caused to a farmer in combat or a wrongful civilian death. Most ISAF forces cannot do the same.

NATO/ISAF needs a staff large enough to handle its coordination responsibilities, and that staff needs to stay around long enough to know what it is doing. The discussion of grand policy coordination will remain pointless when a pickup headquarters is staffed by officers on six-month tours who can scarcely learn their jobs in the time they are deployed, let alone act effectively in a country as complex as Afghanistan.

Careful study of what works and what needs to be fixed at the implementing level would no doubt turn up many additional ideas. These too could be part of the JCMB dialogue and its coordination with NATO. Every nation could use systematic review of its own staff function carried out in consultation with its own people on the ground. This would not be perfect, but it might produce results far more quickly than the endless search for the Holy Grail of a single coordinated policy.

Taken together, these measures would not substitute for the needed levels of troops, equipment, and funding. Nor would they absolve President Karzai of the difficult decisions he must make to improve governance—on the contrary, they would reinforce sorely needed delivery of services by the government to the people of Afghanistan. Paying attention to how we implement already existing plans, particularly among the civilians, could do more, and do it faster, than the search for a "super" leader or a new policy or planning process in the expectation that this will produce some magical solution.

Endnotes

[1] *Saving Afghanistan: An Appeal and Plan for Urgent Action*, The Atlantic Council of the United States, January 2008.

[2] Center for the Study of the Presidency, Afghanistan Study Group Report: Revitalizing Our Efforts, Rethinking Our Strategies," cochairs General James L. Jones and Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering, January 30, 2008.

[3] The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is the actual designation for the integrated troop effort under NATO command. The name itself represents a political compromise that was necessary to secure consensus for the operation from all NATO states.

[4] The London Conference on Afghanistan, "The Afghanistan Compact," January 31–February 1, 2006.

[5] United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan; UNAMA.

[6] CERP, the Commander's Emergency Response Program that can be used for immediate relief work.

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